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ABSTRACT

This activity for students in grade 12 aims to increase their knowledge of the U.S. Constitution and its fundamental ideas: checks and balances, separation of powers, Bill of Rights, and the amendments. Students judge the constitutional powers of each brand of government by participating in the power game. The activity explains how the game is played and sets up 10 "power grabs" for students to resolve (to win the game). The lesson plan lists resources. The teacher notes section addresses California state history/social science content standards; states lesson purpose; discusses classroom organization; and provides power grab answers. (BT)

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Schools of California Online Resources for Education (SCORE): Connecting California's Classrooms to the World

The U.S. Constitution Power Grab Game

Grade 12 - Principles of American Democracy Lesson
by Don M. Carlson

SO 034 280

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San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools
601 North E. Street
San Bernardino, CA 92410-3093

http://rims.k12.ca.us/power_grab_game/index.html

2001

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THE U.S. CONSTITUTION POWER GRAB GAME

The highest law of the land in the United States is the Constitution. This is why you spend so much time learning about it in school. This activity will increase your knowledge of the Constitution and it's fundamental ideas: checks and balances, separation of powers, Bill of Rights and amendments. When finished you will be able to:

1. Identify the three branches of American government.
2. Describe the function of each branch of government.
3. Explain how the "checks and balances" system functions to protect the individual citizen from illegal power hungary politicians.
4. Describe how each branch of government is "separate" in its powers to the other branches of government.
5. Explain how the amendments to the Constitution function today.

You be the judge of the Constitutional powers of each branch of government by participating:

The Power Game -- Checks and Balances in the Constitution:

1. Divide your class into three groups: Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of government. Each student should have a copy of the Constitution.
2. In each round the teacher will give each branch of government an opportunity for an unconstitutional "Power Grab". The remaining two groups have two minutes to find proof from the Constitution (amendments included) by Article, section and clause, why the power grab is unconstitutional.
3. When a person thinks he finds the appropriate check he yells "check". He must be prepared to respond with the answer immediately. If wrong,

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others may try to block the grab for power with the two minutes, alternating between branches until the two minutes are gone or the answer is correct.

4. When checked correctly, the branch receives 10 points. If no one gets the correct answer, the branch grabbing power gets 5 points. No penalty for wrong answers.
5. A round is a question for each branch.

Power Grabs:

1. President - A serious economic crisis takes place in the U.S. The President decides to run for a third term.
   Congress - Congress passes a law taking 10% on lumber being exported.
   Courts - The Court rules that the government may not issue patents because of the need for technological advance.

2. President - The President declares war on China.
   Congress - Congress passes a law that people from Washington may not drive cars in Oregon because of pollution.
   Courts - Since Washington D.C. is not in any state, residents there may not vote in national elections.

3. President - The President appoints Dan Evans to Senator Adams' seat when he resigns due to a personal scandal.
   Congress - Congress impeaches Bush because he pardons North. The Democratic Congress uses their anger to get him.
   Courts - The Court rules that because of our large national debt, the U.S. can no longer borrow money.

4. President - To fight terrorism, anyone found guilty of hijacking will be punished by having their fingernails ripped off.
   Congress - Congress decides that beards are illegal; anyone who wore one in the last year must pay a $100 fine.
   Courts - The Court decides that religion and politics don't mix, therefore; no government official is required to take an oath of office.

5. President - The President decides that Congress will meet in regular session on December 15 of each year.
   Congress - Congress decides to impeach President Bush with the President Pro-Temp of the Senate presiding.
   Courts - The ambassador to Spain is brought home and tried in a New York court for crimes.

6. President - The President orders that a mass murderer be sent back to Washington from Oregon.
   Congress - A House member dies, the House takes four days off to mourn but the Senate says they can only have two days off.

Courts - The Court rules that the heads of departments may no longer make appointments of inferior officers, but only the President of the U.S.

7. President - Paul Newman comes to town and cuts off the heads of all parking meter. President Bush pardons him.
   Congress - Congress passes a law naming 15 university students guilty of crimes against the government - orders them expelled from school.
   Courts - A male teacher sues over sexual discrimination by taking the case directly to the Supreme Court.

8. President - Your land is in the way of a federal highway, so the President takes your land without compensation.
   Congress - Congress passes a law that says you can sue your state in federal court.
   Courts - The Court rules that income tax is illegal and you don't have to pay.

9. President - The President orders that since all citizens over 18 want to vote for the President, they may do so by popular vote.
   Congress - Congress decides because of the contributions of Pete Rose in baseball, they will honor him with the title, "Sir Pete Rose".
   Courts - The Court rules that because of the difficulty in finding honest, law abiding, candidates they will allow Senator Mark Hatfield to be Secretary of Interior.

10. President - The President, concerned about drug violations in the state of Washington, allows the Governor and Attorney General to suspend democracy for a period of one month.
    Congress - Congress decides to change the Constitution to allow the President to be elected to one term of six years.
    Courts - The Courts find Poindexter guilty of treason on the basis of testimony of Ollie North, alone.

• RESOURCES:

United States Constitution Search:
http://www.law.emory.edu/FEDERAL/usconser.html

Online Resources:

- Roadmap to the U.S. Constitution: http://library.thinkquest.org/11572/index.html?tqskip=1
- Charters of Freedom: http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/charters.html

- Amendments Never Ratified for the US Constitution: http://www.law.emory.edu/pub-cgi/print_hit_bold.pl/FEDERAL/usconst/notamend.html?amendments#first_hit
- Government Structure: http://www.kidport.com/RefLib/SocialStudies/GovStructure/GovernmentStructure.htm
- Constitution of the United States: http://www.nara.gov/exhall/charters/constitution/conmain.html

Adapted from a Lesson by Don M. Carlson, Columbia River High School, Vancouver, WA

Teacher Notes

History Social Science Content Standards:

Grade 12

12.4 Students analyze the unique roles and responsibilities of the three branches of government as established by the U.S. Constitution.

1. Discuss Article I of the Constitution as it relates to the legislative branch, including eligibility for office and lengths of terms of representatives and senators; election to office; the roles of the House and Senate in impeachment proceedings; the role of the vice president; the enumerated legislative powers; and the process by which a bill becomes a law.
2. Explain the process through which the Constitution can be amended.
3. Identify their current representatives in the legislative branch of the national government.
4. Discuss Article II of the Constitution as it relates to the executive branch, including eligibility for of office and length of term, election to and removal from of office, the oath of office, and the enumerated executive powers.
5. Discuss Article III of the Constitution as it relates to judicial power, including the length of terms of judges and the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.
6. Explain the processes of selection and confirmation of Supreme Court justices.

8.2.6. Enumerate the powers of government set forth in the Constitution and the fundamental liberties ensured by the Bill of Rights.

8.2.7. Describe the principles of federalism, dual sovereignty, separation of powers, checks and balances, the nature and purpose of majority rule, and the ways in which the American idea of constitutionalism preserves individual rights.

PURPOSE: To encourage students to comprehend these points of emphasis and relate them to the study of the three branches of our federal government. Several activities are described. The culminating activity is the "Power Grab Game" given before the final test on the Constitution Unit.

CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION:

This activity can be done on- or off-line. If you have access to a lab, make the U.S. Constitution Search [http://www.law.emory.edu/FEDERAL/usconser.html] the start page. Read the questions and have the students search the site for the answer, either individually or in groups. If you don't have access to the web, your students can work from a hard copy of the Constitution.

Power Grabs

This gives the power grab with the correct location in the Constitution of the check

1. President - A serious economic crisis takes place in the U.S. The President decides to run for a third term. (Amendment 22)
   Congress - Congress passes a law taking 10% on lumber being exported. (Article I, Section 9, Paragraph 5)
   Courts - The Court rules that the government may not issue patents because of the need for technological advance. (Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 8)

2. President - The President declares war on China. (Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 11)
   Congress - Congress passes a law that people from Washington may not drive cars in Oregon because of pollution. (Article IV, Section 2, Paragraph 1)
   Courts - Since Washington D.C. is not in any state, residents there may not vote in national elections. (Amendment 23)

3. President - The President appoints Dan Evans to Senator Adams' seat when he resigns due to a personal scandal. (Article I, Section 3, Paragraph 2)
   Congress - Congress impeaches Bush because he pardons North. The Democratic Congress uses their anger to get him. (Article II, Section 4)
   Courts - The Court rules that because of our large national debt, the U.S. can no longer borrow money. (Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 2)

4. President - To fight terrorism, anyone found guilty of hijacking will be punished by having their fingernails ripped off. (Amendment 8)
   Congress - Congress decides that beards are illegal; anyone who wore one in the last year must pay a $100 fine. (Article I, Section 9, Paragraph 3)
   Courts - The Court decides that religion and politics don't mix, therefore; no government official is required to take an oath of office. (Article II, Section 1, Paragraph 8 or Article VI, Section 3)

5. President - The President decides that Congress will meet in regular session on December 15 of each year. (Amendment 20, Section 2)
   Congress - Congress decides to impeach President Bush with the President Pro-Temp of the Senate presiding. (Article I, Section 3, Paragraph 6)
   Courts - The ambassador to Spain is brought home and tried in a New York court for crimes. (Article III, Section 2, Paragraph 1)

6. President - The President orders that a mass murderer be sent back to Washington from Oregon. (Article IV, Section 2, Paragraph 2)
   Congress - A House member dies, the House takes four days off to mourn but the Senate says they can only have two days off. (Article I, Section 5, Paragraph 4)
   Courts - The Court rules that the heads of departments may no longer make

appointments of inferior officers, but only the President of the U.S. (Article II, Section 2, Paragraph 2)

7. President - Paul Newman comes to town and cuts off the heads of all parking meter. President Bush pardons him. (Article II, Section 2, Paragraph 1)
   Congress - Congress passes a law naming 15 university students guilty of crimes against the government - orders them expelled from school. (Article I, Section 9, Paragraph 3)
   Courts - A male teacher sues over sexual discrimination by taking the case directly to the Supreme Court. (Article III, Section 2, Paragraph 2)

8. President - Your land is in the way of a federal highway, so the President takes your land without compensation. (Amendment 5)
   Congress - Congress passes a law that says you can sue your state in federal court. (Amendment 11)
   Courts - The Court rules that income tax is illegal and you don't have to pay. (Amendment 16)

9. President - The President orders that since all citizens over 18 want to vote for the President, they may do so by popular vote. (Amendment 26)
   Congress - Congress decides because of the contributions of Pete Rose in baseball, they will honor him with the title, "Sir Pete Rose". (Article I, Section 10, Paragraph 1)
   Courts - The Court rules that because of the difficulty in finding honest, law abiding, candidates they will allow Senator Mark Hatfield be Secretary of Interior. (Article I, Section 6, Paragraph 2)

10. President - The President, concerned about drug violations in the state of Washington, allows the Governor and Attorney General to suspend democracy for a period of one month. (Article IV, Section 4)
    Congress - Congress decides to change the Constitution to allow the President to be elected to one term of six years. (Article IV or Amendment 22)
    Courts - The Courts find Poindexter guilty of treason on the basis of testimony of Ollie North, alone. (Article III, Section 3, Paragraph 1)

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